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C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 009068

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TAGS: PGOV PREL SA IZ
SUBJECT: THE REHABILITATION OF KING SAUD AND HIS TRIBAL
TIES TO IRAQ

Classified By: Political Counselor David H. Rundell
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Saud bin Abudulaziz was the eldest surviving son of the Kingdom's founder Abudulaziz bin Abdulrahman Al Saud. He became Crown Prince and Viceroy of the Nejd in 1933. Upon his father's death in 1953, he became King. He was deposed by his brothers in 1964 and died in exile a few years latter. Incompetence may well have played a part in Saud's removal, but it was his policy of placing many of his 45 sons in senior positions ahead of his more experienced brothers that created a coalition against him. His brothers suspected, probably correctly, that Saud planned to follow his own father's lead by making his eldest son the next King.

¶2. (C) Until very recently, King Saud was erased from Saudi history. His family marginalized. He was remembered, if at all, as a spendthrift who bankrupted the Kingdom with extravagant palaces and payments to the tribes. He was blamed for poor judgment, particularly in his handling of the Yemen Civil and an alleged attempt to assassinate Egypt's President Nasser.

¶3. (C) However, important events did take place during his reign. King Saud created the Council of Ministers and established the Ministries of Commerce, Education and Health. He founded the country's first university, which he named for himself. After meeting with President Eisenhower in Washington, he renewed the lease on the U.S Air Force base in Dhahran. He put down a major strike by Communist and pro-Nasser agitators at Aramco. Perhaps most interestingly, he was the first Saudi King to use the oil weapon when he stopped shipments to Britain and France at the time of the Suez Crisis.

¶4. (C) For over 30 years Mohammed bin Saud bin Abudulaziz was the only son of King Saud to hold high office. Mohammed has been the governor of Saudi Arabia's most obscure province Baha for many years. He is married to King Faisal's daughter Sara. Several years ago, another son of King Saud, Mishal, became governor of another obscure province, Najran. Now it appears that the rehabilitation of this branch of the ruling family has become official. The National Museum has held a large, well publicized exhibition about King Saud. The press has covered a recent meeting between King Abudulah and the nearly 100 children of King Saud. A few pictures of King Saud have begun to appear in Riyadh. As one Saudi told us, "I never expected to see that."

¶5. (C) Comment: So what is going on? First of all the rehabilitation of King Saud is clearly part of King Abdullah's program of rallying and uniting the ruling family by reaching out to those members who have felt excluded. With the Kingdom facing serious foreign threats, he wants to solidify his base. Secondly, King Saud's mother was from a clan of tribal chiefs of great renown, the Bani Urair shiakhs of the Bani Khalid tribe. The Bani Khalid territory stretches from Dhahran to the Euphrates. They are one of the largest tribes in southern Iraq. In the same way that King Abdullah is clearly talking to his cousins in the Iraqi Shammar tribe, the King may well have decided that, in preparation for great Saudi involvement in Iraq, it is time

to improve relations with the Bani Khalid as well. End
Comment

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